

Importance of Eye Safety

Let's review some of the statistics involving children and eye injuries found on the Prevent Blindness Website.

- Eye injuries are the leading cause of blindness in children.
- Sports are the major cause of eye injuries in school-age children, with up to 30% of the injuries occurring to children under the age of 16.
- Most sports related injuries are caused by blunt objects.
- Trauma from objects such as hockey sticks, ski poles, paintballs that are smaller than the eye socket can cause devastating injuries.
- Objects larger than the eye can still injure, as they deform on impact. These injuries tend to be less serious, and most often occur in baseball, basketball, racket sports, and soccer.

The most effective treatment for sports-related eye injuries is **prevention**. Wearing protective eyewear may prevent as many as 90% of all eye injuries. Youth hockey players must now wear mandatory face protectors and the injury rate has dropped significantly. The American Academy of Ophthalmology believes that eyewear should be mandatory for children participating in school and community-sponsored athletic events.

The Academy recommends that young athletes be fitted by eye care professionals and wear shatterproof goggles constructed of non-breakable 3mm polycarbonate, which are twenty times stronger than ordinary eyeglasses. Another safe alternative is to wear helmets with polycarbonate face shields for youth baseball.

Do not assume that any eye injury is harmless. When in doubt, see a doctor immediately. Some first aid procedures for blows to the eye are:

- Apply a cold compress without putting pressure on the eye. Crushed ice in a plastic bag can be taped to the forehead to rest gently on the injured eye.
- In cases of pain, reduced vision, or discoloration (black eye), seek emergency medical care. Any of these symptoms could mean internal eye damage.

For cuts and punctures of the eye or eyelid:

- Do not wash out the eye with water or any other liquid.
- Do not try to remove an object that is stuck in the eye.
- Cover the eye with a rigid shield without applying pressure, the bottom half of a paper cup can be used.
- See a doctor at once.